

# INNOCENT GUILTY

IN WHICH A VOICE FROM THE GRAVE NAMES GUILTY MAN.

## SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Billy Foster, reporter for the New York Evening Wire, was sent to a club to get an interview with Acton Clough, nephew of John B. Clough, a multi-millionaire financier. Acton Clough, who was an artist, had recently exhibited a strange and fantastically weird painting called "The Snake" in a Fifth Avenue gallery. Rumor said that the picture was based on a personal experience of the queer young artist. While on his way to the club Foster passed the mansion of old John B. Clough, and heard a woman scream with terror in the house. He rushed into the house, and there in the great library sat the multi-millionaire tied to a chair with rawhide ropes, and a dagger was buried to the hilt in his heart. "The Snake" was opposite the dead man and was slashed into ribbons. Foster bribed a groom in the house for photographs of the murdered millionaire and others connected with the tragedy, and rushing to the nearest telephone reported the mystery to the Evening Wire office, which quickly printed the story and scored a great beat on all the other New York newspapers. Metcalf Vincent, a beautiful young newspaper writer, was hesitating whether to marry Billy or his rival, Philip Budgett. When she saw Billy's great "beat" she was on the point of deciding in his favor.

Foster magnanimously writes Marcella that he will not claim her on the "beat" he made as he believes the real "beat" will be in first printing the name of the murderer, so the race between the two reporters goes hotly on. Henry Brewster, another nephew of the murdered millionaire, who had visited his uncle the fatal night and who disappeared, returns, and in an interview, accuses Acton Clough. On his statement the latter is arrested. Foster is convinced that Acton is guilty and works along those lines. Holbrook takes the opposite side and attempts to prove Clough innocent. A day or two later while Marcella is in the district attorney's office she picked up a knotted piece of string to do up a package. It came from the murdered man's house, and the officials gave her permission to take it. Finally Holbrook arranged for a personal interview with Acton Clough.

Clough tells him that Brewster is the guilty man, and Holbrook, believing him, proceeds to prove it. He shadows Brewster for days, and with Bradley Sinclair, a friend, he discovers valuable information in a Broadway restaurant.

## CHAPTER V (Cont'd).

When he returned to the dining room he found Brewster and his companions with their heads close together over their cocktail glasses. The conversation ceased as he approached and placed their oysters before them. The oriental and his companion were languidly trifling with their roast. Sinclair motioned to Holbrook and ordered him to bring some dish or other. As he did so the reporter laid the note by Sinclair's plate.

The explorer's eyebrows went up, but his face remained quite imperturbable, and Phil again hastened rejoicingly to the kitchen. When he returned, he received another order from Sinclair, and as he removed the explorer's empty plate, he saw a scrap of paper in it. Again he hurried to the kitchen, where he read this note: "Dear Boy:

"I envy you your adventure. I'm eager to join you. Don't fail to see me tomorrow. What the Chinaman's visitor said, in Chinese, was roughly this: 'The name on the folds of the snake was the name you thought. And the sphinx has revealed one of its riddles.' The Chinaman replied: 'The snake must speak again. I shall meet you at midnight in the secret shrine. Go now.' If these queer sentences come into your adventure, my boy, I can tell you a thing or two about our friend the Chinaman. And look out for him!"

Holbrook's heart leaped. The name on the folds of the snake! By that must be meant the name of Henry Brewster. This Chinaman must be the alleged Chinese artist whose agent was investigating the picture of "The Snake" with the microscope. Evidently, he had discovered its secret.

But he did not seek the mystery of its technical composition. What interest had this Chinaman in the matter? And what was meant by other riddles of the sphinx? Evidently the riddle revealed was the will. And at midnight there was to be a meeting in the secret shrine! Darker and deeper grew the waters of this mystery. And Phil's mind thrilled with the quest of the adventure.

When he returned to the dining-room, Sinclair gave no slightest hint that his waiter was of any interest to him, and Phil played his part with care and attention. The Chinaman and his friend had finished their dinner and were now leaning smoking cigarettes and sipping coffee. Sinclair and his friends left the dining-room. Meanwhile, Brewster and his companions were eating hastily and talking earnestly in undertones.

Philip, on the watch with strained attention, saw that both the Chinaman and his companion looked from time to time at Brewster and his companions with keen, scrutinizing eyes. By and by Brewster finished his dinner and paid his bill. Holbrook bowed obsequiously over the half-dollar coin Brewster handed him mechanically as a tip, but smiled to himself as he pocketed the coin apart from his other money. He resolved to keep that coin—it would be a souvenir of a curious adventure.

He helped the men into their cloaks, and then performed the same service for the Chinaman and his friend, who followed the Brewster party to the street. On his part Holbrook acted quickly. He slipped out to a side room, which had been placed at his disposal by Philip, and drew on a long light overcoat that completely concealed his waiter's dress.

Then he hastened to the street. Brewster and his party were just moving away in an automobile. The Chinaman and his friend were entering a second automobile. Philip Holbrook, too, had an automobile in waiting.

"Tom," he said to the chauffeur, "keep Brewster in sight." The chauffeur—one often employed before by the reporter—nodded and stopped noiselessly along in the wake of the Chinaman's car. Phil's car had a closed body, and for the next five minutes he occupied himself in so changing his garb that in quick order he had all the semblance of a man about town.

The three automobiles were directed into Fifth Avenue, and went at an average rate of speed northward. Holbrook's chauffeur bent to the open front of the tonneau.

"The Chink seems trying to draw

abreast of Brewster's car, Mr. Holbrook," he said. "All right, Tom. When he gets near Brewster, turn on the juice and let us try to see what's going on," answered the reporter.

Tom grinned. "Right-o!" he said. "Say, Mr. Holbrook, that's a dandy make-up you have. If you hadn't spoken I would never have known you. But say, if the Chink quits trailing Brewster, do you want me to follow him or Brewster?"

The reporter hesitated a moment. "I hardly know," he said. "I very much want to keep Brewster in sight; yet I always know where to pick him up and I don't know where the Chinaman has his headquarters. I guess we'd better trail the yellow man tonight, Tom."

"All right," said the chauffeur. And snapped his lever down. The machine made a quick start forward.

They were just about at Forty-second street, blocked by cross-town traffic, and all three of the machines were obliged to stop. The Chinaman's car had drawn abreast of that in which Brewster was, and Tom stopped his machine in a relative position on the other side.

Holbrook, all eyes and ears, saw the Chinaman lean forward, look intently at Brewster and say, in perfect English:

"I want to tell you the name on the folds of the snake. I want to tell you also—Follow me!"

A ghastly pallor overspread Brewster's face. His lower jaw dropped, muscles twitching, and his eyes seemed to protrude from their sockets. He licked his dry lips and then said faintly:

"I'll follow you."

The block broke and the vehicles on the Avenue moved forward again. Before they had fairly started, however, a fourth motor-car steered slowly by the Chinaman's machine, coming almost to a stop. Holbrook, phenomenally keen-sighted, thought he saw in the glare of the car-light on the street corner something white tossed by the Chinaman into the car, which had just come into the game.

The chauffeur leaned down and picked something from the floor.

"It might be a note with orders," thought the reporter. "Good Heavens! Has this Chinaman a whole organization at his command? I wish I'd had Sinclair tell me more about this man."

At any rate, whether its occupants had received orders or not, the new car shot forward; then, somewhat to Holbrook's surprise, turned suddenly and came tearing back.

As it came nearer, Holbrook heard a sound of boisterous singing and laughter coming from it, and saw that it was occupied by two young men in evening dress, who, from their noisy demonstrations of alcoholic enjoyment, seemed to have dined too well.

One of the young men was driving the car in a course that swerved and zigzagged murderously. A thought flashed into the reporter's mind, and he hastily spoke to his chauffeur:

"Look out for that car, Tom! I've an idea they want to disable us. Ah!" He had spoken none too soon—Tom had gathered his meaning none too adequately.

The next instant the fourth automobile came skidding across the road, blundering in their direction, Tom with quick nerve, jerked the wheel round till his car nearly ran up on the sidewalk. Only thus did he avert a collision which must have inevitably have wrecked both machines.

Profuse apologies poured from the lips of the seemingly intoxicated men. Tom raved them soundly and lashed to go on in the pursuit of the other cars, which had gained considerably through what Holbrook was sure was a premeditated accident.

They darted along, continued on its course down-town.

"They probably don't dare to risk a direct attack," said Holbrook.

"The pirates!" exclaimed Tom. "I wish I had my big car here, I'd give 'em a run for their money in the wrecking game."

As they sped along in the wake of the other cars, Holbrook was doing some anxious thinking.

The Chinaman knew that he was being trailed and would not, in all probability, go directly to his rendezvous. Still, counting upon the certainty that his shadower could not witness the interview, he might do so.

So Holbrook resolved to keep up the chase.

It did not last much longer. The Chinaman's car, followed by Brewster's, turned down a side street in the Nineties and stopped before a dark house, the middle of the block. Holbrook checked his car at the corner.

Looking out, he saw the four men alight from their machine. The next minute, the Chinaman and Brewster entered the house together, while the other men returned to their cars, which stayed in front of the house a few feet so the machine won't be in sight from the street, Tom," said Holbrook.

This was done and Holbrook jumped out.

"No, I haven't," said Holbrook. "Then I'll let you have one. It's a rather dangerous place, my young friend," said the other gravely. "Though it's in the heart of fashionable New York, I know of much safer places in the heart of a fanatic Eastern city, than this dark house. But come along, I'll tell you more when we get out of the street."

Sinclair dismissed his cab and led the way rapidly along Fifth avenue till they came to the block above the street where the dark house stood. In the middle of the block he turned in a house, opened the door with a latch-key and switched on an electric light, disclosing a long hallway in which were stands of curious Eastern arms, Turkish bargings, and other souvenirs of his travels.

He led the way to the second floor and into a big room fitted as a library. From this, toward the back of the house, opened a long gallery, evidently a laboratory, where Sinclair, whose

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"The secret shrine!" exclaimed Holbrook. "That is where he is to meet the man who spoke to him in the restaurant at midnight."

"Yes. Perhaps we will be there too. Now tell me something of your interest in Dr. Ling Foo."

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was visible. He eagerly put his eye close to a carefully arranged peep-hole and looked down.

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chronic complaint was that ordinary life "bored him to extinction," carried on various singular chemical experiments during the time he was not filling in, to overflowing with many strange interests and adventures. Holbrook used jestingly to tell him that he was a medieval alchemist and explorer, born ten centuries out of his time.

Sinclair threw off his Inverness, opened a polished golden case, took from a cabinet a couple of revolvers and handed one to Holbrook, at the same time thrusting another into his own pocket.

Holbrook was all impatience to go, but Sinclair seemed in no hurry. He produced some cigarettes and offering one to the reporter, said:

"Sit down a minute, while we clear the air a bit."

"First let me tell you something of our Chinese friend. He goes by the name of Dr. Ling Foo, but that is only one of a score of his names. I heard of him first in India, where he was concerned in a very neat series of jewel robberies, by which he profited enormously, and from the consequences of which he very cleverly escaped."

"He is a man of wonderful personal attainments and has also perfected a very fine organization of criminals, comprising clever scoundrels of many nationalities, whom he absolutely dominates. He has agents in all the big cities. Head waiters in clubs and restaurants, bell boys in hotels, servants in consulates, humble laundrymen in Chinese laundries, policemen, men in society—he has men and women of all grades of life attached to his service by one string or another."

"Moreover, he's the head of a fake occult society by means of which he systematically plunders many silly rich American women who seek for new sensations in out-of-the-way cults; such as mesmerism, magic, and the so-called black art of the East. The house in the next street is the headquarters of this cult."

"Now, while it's a swindle, it also contains many of the most interesting and ancient rituals of the Far East; matters which never before have been revealed outside of the mysterious temples of the Orient. And many of these mysteries are not shown to the ordinary dupes brought into the house in the next street, but are kept for a darker purpose, I believe—that is, for the terrifying of victims, in order to bring them bodily and mentally under the control of Dr. Ling Foo."

"I discovered something of what was going on in this house nearly a year ago and resolved to make investi-

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